

# THE ASYLUM

*Quarterly Journal of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society*

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## BIBLIOMANIA MEETING AT CINCINNATI ANA

On August 18, 1980, over 100 members and guests attended the first formal meeting of the Numismatic Bibliomania Society at the American Numismatic Association convention in Cincinnati. After those in attendance introduced themselves and briefly described their book collecting specialties, George Kolbe introduced fellow bibliomaniac and noted numismatic scholar, John J. Ford, Jr. An edited transcript of Ford's entertaining and informative discussion follows:

JOHN FORD: My name is John Ford, and I don't know what I'm doing here! The interest indicated by the audience is rather diverse, and it's pretty difficult for me to know where to begin. First, I'd like to make a comment: Vincent Alones mentioned the name of Clarence Edgar. Clarence Edgar was a bank teller in my home town of Rockville Centre, New York. In the summer of 1935, when I was eleven years old, I became interested in coins. I would borrow a dollar from my father and I'd get a couple of rolls of Lincoln cents, take them home and look for SVDBs, 14Ds and so forth. I'd go through them in a half hour and be back for more. Either because he felt sorry for me or to get rid of me (because I drove him nuts!), Clarence Edgar gave me my first legitimate rare coin, an 1846 silver dollar. Clarence subsequently got me into coin dealing on the side, and we became very good friends. After World War II, he became a specialist in selling numismatic books, as did my late friend Aaron Feldman. Clarence Edgar died in 1958, and of course, Aaron Feldman died in 1976. Feldman is the fellow who popularized the saying, "Buy the book before the coin."

Now, I don't know how one becomes a dealer in numismatic literature. Bibliomania is an excellent description. It is a mania! It's a disease! You get involved and one book leads to another.

I'm surprised to see that there are any coin dealers here at all tonight, because I was under the impression that most of the current breed couldn't read! No, I take that back. It's a dirty crack. They can read. They can read the *Grey Sheet*, and they can find the pages in the *Guide Book*, but beyond that their libraries are limited. I asked some of them the reasons for that, and the usual reply was, "I don't have time." They want something with pictures, and underneath the pictures they want prices. Preferably, you put out the new editions very quickly with new prices (which is good for the guys who print them), but anything that involves more

than a sentence or two of composition befuddles them because it becomes boring. I'm not being sarcastic. No, I *am* being sarcastic! In fact, I'm being nasty! I think many of the coin dealers would be a lot better off if they read something. I'm serious.

Incidentally, I'd like this to be an informal discussion. It's not a formal talk. I've nothing here to read from. I don't have any notes, or Ronald Reagan index cards.

The other day I was working in my library, and I came across one of the first numismatic books I ever obtained, a copy of Gilbert's work on half cents. I mention it because it's rather interesting. In looking at the book, a thought went through my mind about the circumstances under which it was obtained. In October of 1941, I visited Thomas Elder in Pleasantville, New York. At that time, Elder must have been in his late sixties. Homer K. Downing and I had heard about the legendary Tom Elder, and we went up to see him together. Though he was semi-retired, he still ran ads in *Hobbies Magazine*. We went up to find out if he had any coins left.

Elder, who originally published the Gilbert half cent book in 1916, still had a quantity of unbound copies available. He asked us, "Would you like one of these at three dollars?" meaning the unbound text and the set of eight photographic plates. We both gave him the three dollars and we each got a set. I went to a book-binder in the Bronx named Levine, who was also frequented by Homer Downing and the American Numismatic Society. I think he charged me another three dollars to bind the book. To give you an idea of what kind of an amateur I was, I had the title of the book put on the front cover: United States Half Cents / E. Gilbert, and underneath, 1916. Then, at the bottom of the cover, I put "John J. Ford, 1941," which was the way a real seventeen-year-old would do it.

If I was going to see Tom Elder today, I would certainly handle the situation differently. The first thing I would do after finding out that he wanted three dollars for one copy, would be to ask him what he wanted for the whole pile. The second thing I would do would be to get him to autograph as many copies as I could. Then, instead of having the book bound in plain library buckram with my name on the cover (which is rather crass), I would have them nicely bound with the title and author stamped on the spine. Obviously, having the title stamped on the front cover instead of the spine is not very practical if you're looking for a book on the shelf.

In the last thirty-nine years, I've gotten heavily involved with numismatic literature. The reason is very simple. I was very much interested in collecting coins, and subsequently began dealing in coins to pay for my collecting interests. Then I became a full-time professional so that I could spend 24 hours a day on numismatics, a subject which meant everything to me!

Early on, when I was approaching being a full-time dealer (in fact, I was practically a full-time dealer, as I was out of work and was *schlepping* coins to eat), I went out to Montauk to visit with Wayte Raymond. During one of our early conversations, I asked him what was the secret of the coin business. I said, "Do you have to have a lot of money? Do you have to have a big stock of coins? Do you have to have real good customers? What's the secret?" Wayte Raymond replied,

“John, it’s very simple: You just have to know more than the man you’re doing business with.”

It’s quite obvious that books are concentrated knowledge. There’s no one that I’m aware of who has collected numismatic literature who has read every page of every book. If you find somebody who says that they have, they’re kidding you. The thing to do is to become familiar enough with the book and its contents to know where to locate information quickly. That’s the value of a numismatic library. In my opinion, it’s knowing that the information is there.

Of course, a good numismatic library goes beyond having the books on the shelves. It involves having files of photographs, pamphlets, documents, and related pieces of information, because not all of the data that’s available in the coin business has been published. I have Xerox copies, typewritten copies, carbon copies, and all other manuscripts authored by Walter Breen which have never been published, and they’re invaluable to me. In addition to that, I have practically my entire correspondence file (at least my end of it) of the letters that Walter wrote to me in 1949 and 1950. A lot of the information in those letters is not dated information. It’s information that you can’t find anywhere else, and it might not even still be in Walter’s head. He may have forgotten some of it. A good library encompasses not just the books, but the related material, the archival material, the notes, the photographs, the documents, and so on. As I stated earlier, the average dealer wants a few books, and he wants simplicity. He wants pictures, and he wants valuations. Well, I’m not going to pick on the average dealer. The average collector, and particularly the investor-oriented individual, wants a “quick fix.” He wants an easy solution to his problems. Unfortunately, numismatics is not that kind of a business. I believe that it was Di Vinci who said that the definition of genius is “minute attention to detail.” If there ever was a business that required minute attention to detail, it’s numismatics. How someone can get a book for five bucks, and subscribe to a *Grey Sheet* and have minute attention to detail is beyond my comprehension! That is “playing the market”; it’s playing “pricing”; it’s playing “valuations”. It’s knowing who pays what, and how much everybody else is paying, and what it was worth yesterday, and how much it might be worth tomorrow. But the reasons for those prices, and the reasons why Mr. X and Mr. Y will pay them, and the reasons why the prices will change up or down, is based entirely upon the importance of the item and also upon how many people are likely to perceive that importance. In other words, knowledge allows you to anticipate the market.

Of course, it’s very easy to make these pontifical remarks. In fact, they’re almost obvious. But you’d be surprised how few people have followed them over the years. In a couple of talks I’ve given, I have remarked that more good, basic numismatic literature, reference books, definitive books, and fine books have been published in the last twenty years than in the previous century of American numismatics. That’s true. We are getting to the era of specialization. The material is there. In fact, it’s coming out so fast, and there is so much of it, that it is hard to keep up with. It’s been my *modus operandi* for the past thirty years to buy any book or reference that pertains directly or indirectly to American numismatics. This includes the peripheral areas of Central America, the West Indies and Canada. And then, there are European



books that have a connotation relating to American numismatics.

Since I retired from being an active dealer in 1971, and have returned again to collecting, I have traveled farther and farther afield on numismatic literature. In other words, I now buy books on banking. In fact, I've lately worked very hard collecting the *Banker's Magazine*, the *Banker's Almanac*, and various other related publications of the late 1870s and 1880s designed for the banking fraternity. If you collect National banknotes, why would you want banking magazines of the 1880s? Well, I'll tell you why. These banking magazines contain the obituaries of all the bankers who were active in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, and who signed the obsolete banknotes and operated the obsolete banks. These obituaries are, presumably, to my knowledge, the only place where you can get information on a lot of these people. It's a tremendous source of research material.

My personal inclination is to collect books to have access to the knowledge in the books. Now, there are people who collect books for other reasons. Some people collect nice bindings. Some people collect in directions which I find hard to fathom. For example, it's been a great mystery to me why anybody would want to buy old *Red Books*. It's mystified me for years. I have old *Red Books*. Dick Yeoman's been sending me complimentary copies for the last twenty years, and they're all autographed. I keep them for sentimental reasons, but I never look at them. I see where certain editions bring several hundred dollars. Why?

GUEST: I'll tell you why. I heard this, and I assume that it's true. When some collectors decide to sell, they want the old *Red Books* from the time they were buying coins with the prices they were paying, in order to avoid large taxes.

FORD: That smells like fraud!

HARRY BASS: Why did Wayte Raymond make those National Coin Albums? Well, it's because there will always be an empty hole left for the coin you didn't have. The same theory applies to a series of books.

FORD: You mean that they become collectibles just because they want each year?

BASS: Because they're numbered. Just like the *Numismatist* is numbered. Do you have all of the *Numismatists*?

FORD: Yes. But there's a reason for that, Harry. You know it as well as I do. Each issue of the *Numismatist* contains information. And quite frankly, as a guide to the actual market at the time of publication, the *Red Book* is a very unreliable source. If I were doing it, I'd take the *Numismatist* or the *Numismatic Scrapbook* for the period in question and look at the ads. You'll have a much better idea of the market, right down to the month.

GUEST: May I call the speaker's attention to the fact that we were talking about bibliomania?

FORD: Okay. I take it that there's all types of schizophrenia in numismatics. As I said, my basic interest in collecting books is for the information that they contain. However, I've gone afield. I've gone astray. I've bought duplicate books because they had a bookplate in them of a famous numismatist, or because it was a presentation copy. I've also bought duplicate copies to upgrade the bindings. I love leather! (audience laughter) What's so funny about that?

GUEST: Do you also have a nice leather jacket, John?

FORD: Oooooohhh!

GUEST: You used to be quicker, too, John.

FORD: Well, I'm tired. I had a rough day on the bourse. I didn't have my sneakers on today. I have new shoes, and it was awful over there. You're sitting in the front row just to keep me awake!

BASS: John, I'm no authority, and I know that I can't boost your ego any, because it's up there pretty good, but if the opportunity ever arose, I would pay you a substantial premium to add that Gilbert book that you have to my library.

GUEST: Quick, buy some more copies, John!

BASS: You might not realize it, but you're moving in to the genre of Elder, Wayne Raymond, B. Max Mehl.

FORD: Harry, I'll see you in the lobby in about an hour. I'm going to digress here. I have to tell you something about Harry Bass. Somehow, he heard that I was affiliated with a company called Ford Numismatic Publications. Now, what was Ford Numismatic Publications? When I was with New Netherlands Coin Company in the late 1950s, the business was slow. We had lots of coins and very few customers. You went to an ANA convention, and you could walk around the bourse in an hour and a half. Then, you had to keep repeating that for three or four days, because there were only thirty or forty dealers. I knew them all by their first names. They knew what I wanted, and I knew what they wanted. It was a very friendly thing, and we had plenty of free time. In fact, that's how the game of Dollar Poker developed. Since we had time, we could talk to the customers. One of the things that I always tried to do was sell them a book. We even put on every page in our auction catalogues back in the late 1950s, "A well informed customer is our best customer." I found that a customer who came in knowing what he wanted and why he wanted it, was an easy guy to sell something to. In fact, all you had to do was lay the thing down, and the guy would climb up on the table. He wanted it, which was a lot different than my giving him a sales pitch.

Now, because we had a small office, selling numismatic books was difficult. I induced Clarence Edgar and a fellow by the name of Jack Munson to set up a business called Ford Numismatic Publications, in Lindbrook, New York, where they

had some space to keep the books. I was supposed to find advantageous book buys, and send them preferred customers. They were supposed to make up listings. Munson dropped out, Edgar died, and a fellow by the name of Werner Amelingmeier became involved. Werner was a Ford dealer in Lindbrook, who came to see me in 1951. I had known him for many years, from the time when I worked for Lever Brothers as a purchasing agent, in Fort Carswell. He said, "Now that you're a full-time coin dealer, let me know if you get any coins that are interesting or good buys." He was one of the first coin investors. This was in 1951. I'll tell you how we got Werner involved in investing. We had an auction, strictly of foreign coins, and if we didn't get any bids on something, we sold it to Werner. You might say that's a shameful way to treat somebody, but he made a lot of money. He really did. If we got a fifty dollar bid on a coin that was estimated at one hundred dollars, and I thought the coin should bring eighty, I gave it to Werner for fifty-five dollars. My partner, Charles Wormser, had a thing about our not buying anything from our own auctions. Werner took all of his profits from the used car business, which was considerable in the 1950s, and put it into coins. It got to the point that Werner had coins and coins and coins, and he started to wonder what it was all about.

When the numismatic book business became available after Edgar's death in 1958, Werner said, "I'll play with that." His real reason was that he could look at all these books, and find out what these coins were that I had been sticking him with all those years. He was like a different person. He took all of the books, and put them upstairs in the Ford agency. Now, this was a *schlock* Ford agency! The reason was obvious. He was taking all of the money out of the business and buying coins, and he wasn't even painting the place. In 1966, Harry Bass said to me, "Who's this guy that runs Ford Numismatic Publications?" I told him it was Werner Amelingmeier. Well, it took Harry two days just to be able to pronounce it! I told him to take the train out to Rockville Centre, and that I'd drive him over to see Werner. Now, I want to show you how dedicated Harry was early on. It was either November or December of 1966, and it was cold. The temperature must have been about 25 degrees upstairs where the books were, and there was no heater. I dumped Harry off about one o'clock in the afternoon. He spent four or five hours there looking at books and auction catalogues, and anything else he could find. He was stowing cartons full of the stuff. I rescued him about six o'clock. His nose and hands were blue, but he was having a ball. I took him home and we had supper, and then he started talking about all of the junk he had picked up. We continued talking until about two o'clock in the morning, and Harry ended up sleeping on the couch. I didn't think Harry was going to stay that late, and I'm sure Harry didn't either. The point is, Harry got the bug for numismatic literature that afternoon and evening. He is one of the few well-to-do collectors that I've ever met who became enamoured with numismatic literature. Most people who have the funds and the wherewithal to be real collectors, and who buy expensive coins, don't have the time to read. I assume that Harry has the time, because he sure as hell has gone after the books. I think that he uses them the same way that I do.

In 1968, when Harry was at my house, he took one look at my library and



offered me a deal. I'm still trying to figure it out. He said, "I want to buy your whole library, and you can have the use of it until you die." What were you going to do, Harry? Have a hit man get me on Monday? After all, we're the same age!

BASS: I'll still take the deal!

FORD: He must know something that I don't. I'm trying to stay healthy, Harry. I take vitamins.

Anyhow, I do think that it's terrific that a serious collector is interested in numismatic literature. I got a call the other day from a major coin company, and they asked my opinion of a job applicant. The guy in question is very involved in collecting numismatic literature, and that, to me, is one hell of a plus. If I was in the coin business today, and running one of these big companies with 35 or 40 employees, the most important thing outside of the applicant's honesty would be his inclination into having a library, from an intellectual viewpoint. An inventory of his library would probably be my major qualification for a competent numismatist.

On a rising market, anybody can run up and down the bourse aisles and make money. On a static market, only about 30% can make money. On a down market, only 2 or 3% can make money. I'm talking now about the normal coin business. I'm *not* talking about the speculative rolls and bags and garbage. I'm talking about numismatic material. The man with the knowledge knows what he's looking at and what it is. If he's real good, he knows where it's been. If he knows all that, he knows where it should go, and that's the ball game. You only can do that with books! Nobody has a mind, not even Walter Breen, that can store all of the contents of all of the numismatic books in one head. You really have to have a library.

Now, there are variables in collecting numismatic literature. As you all know, or should know, George Kolbe has auction sales. In these sales, he sometimes offers eighteenth-century books with beautiful copperplate engravings. They are usually in Latin or German, and the engravings are very quaint. The bindings have worm holes in them, and the whole thing smells musty and is falling apart. And yet, George gets a couple of hundred dollars for them. Now, I think that the guy that buys those books is some kind of a nut! First of all, he puts it in his library, and it's going to be a source of bugs for the rest of the books for years. That's true, you know, they all have worm holes. Secondly, there's nothing in those books that will teach you anything. The guys that made the copperplate engravings were out of touch with the guys that wrote the books. They took artistic license. They made Vespasian look like Augustus, and Augustus like Vespasian. All of the illustrations were hand engraved on a copper plate, and they are inaccurate. The information, if it's in Latin, is worthless to me, and I think even to most doctors. But the books are still collectors' items.

It's a similar situation with *Heath Counterfeit Detectors*. You can buy four Counting House editions, which are larger format, and three Pocket editions, and you have all the different types of *Heath Counterfeit Detectors*. The only variables beyond that were caused by the girls who inserted the plates. Sometimes, they

stuck in a couple of extra plates. In other words, the plates were laid out on a table, and the girls just *schlepped* them into the books, bang, bang, bang. Sometimes, you can get awfully weird plate arrangements. There are nuts who try to collect every *Heath Counterfeit Detector*, of which there are 17 or 18 editions, and multiple printings of many editions. Several people have attempted to list all the variants, and it's an almost endless job. As soon as you think that you've got all of the 45 or 50 different varieties, some guy comes up with a new one. Then, there are presentation and full leather copies.

There are also many facets to collecting nineteenth-century auction catalogues. You can collect them by dealer, or you can try to get them all, as John Adams is trying to do. You can collect them whether the individual lots are priced or not, but, to me, those catalogues are worthless unless you know what the coins actually sold for. Then you can advance and try to collect catalogues with buyers' names, which is necessary for pedigree research. You can insist on the catalogue having all the photographic plates. You can insist on the binding being pristine. You can carry this in any direction that you want.

The big thing at the moment is collecting Hard Times tokens and related merchants' tokens. Since part II of the Garrett sale, a lot of people have gone bananas over this series. They ask me, "What books should I have?" I tell them that they must have a copy of the J.N.T. Levick sale by W. Elliot Woodward, of May, 1884, and also, the Benjamin Betts sale held by Lyman Low in January, 1898. If you're not familiar with the Betts sale, I have a copy here on the table in a contemporary binding. It was purchased today at the bourse table of George Kolbe, who, in my opinion, sold it too cheap! It displays the bookplate of Charles M. Johnson. Now, who is Charles M. Johnson? He was the man who was the sparkplug and the father of the ANA headquarters in Colorado Springs. This catalogue was earlier in the library of Ralph R. Barker of Providence, Rhode Island. His library was broken up in the 1930s or early 1940s. He was a turn of the century numismatist.

The Betts catalogue has three or four plates which are halftones, and a couple of plates of line drawings. The illustrations were poorly done and are of little usefulness. In listing Betts' collection of merchants' tokens and other items, Lyman Low sprinkled the catalogue throughout with footnotes. These footnotes contain information, particularly on the tokens, which is not found anywhere else. If you're interested in tokens, the information you need is right here in this catalogue. For example: lot 292, *The Theatre of New York. America. Front View of the Old Park View Theatre*. This penny, which is considered Colonial, sells today for about \$3500. In Low's footnote, he states: "The Park Theatre, which this token is genuinely believed to refer to, was commenced June 1, 1795 and completed in 1798. The proprietors petitioned for permission to erect a portico over the sidewalk, but was not granted. The theatre was burned May 25, 1820, and again, in 1821 according to one authority. In February, 1824, a grand ball was given for the benefit of the Greeks when \$2,000.00 was realized." I don't know where else to find that information except in the Betts catalogue. That's why this catalogue is worth owning. If you collect merchants' tokens, it can tell you something about the tokens.

(continued next issue)



## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

The first issue of the Asylum arrived today, and I've just finished reading it. Here's my subscription, and I'll be happy to be counted as one of the nuts to be added into the fruitcake. Hopefully, this will grow into an important organization that is well needed.

Richard Picker

Enclosed is my subscription to the Asylum. I especially enjoyed reading the comments of fellow book and catalog collectors concerning their "mania". And here for a long time I thought that I was the only book-looney with a coin interest second only to building my reference library. . . . I'm Free at last!! . . . no more self-doubts about my sanity!!!

Richard E. Lane

Congrats on Asylum! I apply for commitment and enclose check, for straight jacket.

Randolph Zander

To the Asylum,  
Attention Head Keeper:

The following may be of interest to you. While no names can be mentioned, the patient referred to is under our care and treatment. The case is quite sad, and we seize any opportunity to relieve pressures upon those who must remain in close contact with the patient.

Case History: Diagnosis; Bibliomaniacus Progressus

Patient is one of an edition of three circa 1912. Original vellum but quite worn about the edges. Original gilt top now oxidized to

gray. Internally shaken and may not be playing with a full deck.

Examination indicates that the current problems stem from a previous well diagnosed attack of Numismaticus Collectorensus, complicated by a particularly virulent strain of Philatelicus Americanicus which is frequently found in conjunction with the prior problem. (See Bowers, Kosoff, Scott and Gibbons for details.)

Although no cure was ever made, the two serious maladies were held in remission through a regime of medication consisting of wonder drug MS65 and MS60. The Philatelicus was held in check by a massive dose of 404 M. N.H. XF. As can be seen, no cost was too great in the attempt to restore the patient to normalcy.

Unfortunately, in the midst of treatment an unforeseen injection of Bibliographical serum was administered by a well meaning practitioner. This immediately set off a raging collecting fever in the patient. It was into this maelstrom of misery that your Volume 1 #1 arrived. It has served to ease the fever momentarily.

It is with this poor Devil's welfare in mind that you will find enclosed the initial fee required for entrance into "The Asylum". Please rush the next issue as soon as it is available so as to alleviate the enormous strain on hard pressed family and friends.

Howard S. Baron  
Head of Ward

I do not approve of the name Bibliomania and will never join under that name.

G. L.

I was pleased to see renewed interest in a Numismatic Bibliomania Society. I have been looking for a shepherd to guide this little lost sheep into the greener paths of Bibliomania.

J. Richard Becker

Many thanks for sending us your psychiatric journal. I think the idea has much to commend it.

David Edmunds  
Seaby (Rare Books) Ltd.

Thank you for the introductory issue of the Asylum. The first issue stresses American numismatics. Would you be considering ancient Greek, Roman, and other areas? So little attention is given these areas in the United States in most of the available publications. European sources do cover these subjects extensively but the language problem requires translation, a publication such as you propose, could provide a resume of major articles, or even arrange a shared interpretation service to minimize costs.

Book reviews of current publications, references to articles in magazines and other sources, available off prints of lectures, exhibitions, comments as to reprints — all are fertile sources to aid the numismatist and the bibliomaniac. Your possible expansion into these areas should increase the range of subscribers and make a valuable contribution to the devoted hobbyist.

Herman Miller

"In response to the muddy thinking of Jack Collins on the subject of bookshelf order"

Ha! Any fool knows that the correct way to place books on the shelf is by area of interest, reading from left to right, and with spine titles reading from bottom to top. Unless of course the librarian is a left-handed bibliophile (a sub species), in which case the whole process is reversed.

It should also be noted that the foregoing holds true only in the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere the Coriolis effect reverses the order once again. This may explain why so little numismatic literature of note has come from New Zealand, Antarctica, and Punta Del Este.

The reader might be interested in the underlying physiology of spine title reading from bottom to top. Basically, it has to do with the left side of the brain having developed language ability and therefore greater mass. Gravitational attraction makes it more comfortable to tilt the head toward the left shoulder as one slides from left to right while perusing the titles in one's numismatic library.

There! Doesn't it seem simple once it has been explained?

John R. Mawhinney

DEAR Sir,  
I want to join  
your Book Club

X

H. Joseph Levine

## WOODWARD vs FROSSARD

*by John W. Adams*

The early numismatic literature turns us on. Just why this should be so is sometimes difficult to explain to the uninitiated. We can point to pages which contain long-forgotten facts; we can trace opinions which became the foundation of what is today considered numismatic knowledge.

However, dusty facts and opinions are obviously insufficient to explain our bibliomania. There is a living, personal element at work here – one which adds warmth and zest to the treasures which line our shelves. To illustrate, I would like to reconstruct a contretemps between Edouard Frossard and W.E. Woodward.

Frossard and Woodward were, of course, two of our early coin dealers. In fact, Woodward was one of the original “First Three”. At the time of our story in 1881, he was the only one of the three still practicing the trade and, as such, was considered by most to be the dean of the profession. Frossard was relatively new to the business, having hung out his shingle in 1878. Both men published auction catalogs; in addition, Frossard edited and published a lively periodical by the name of “Numisma”.

The duel begins with small fanfare. On January 10, 1881, Woodward commenced auctioning the well known collection of William Jenks. Lot #468 in the sale is described by the catalog as follows:

468    Pescennius Niger. Head of Pescennius Niger facing right; “Imp Caes Pes Nigerius”, etc.; rev., figure standing, facing left; “Concordia”. Aureus; pierced over the head, in other respects fine; of the greatest rarity.

It is well known that a gold coin of Pescennius Niger was for a long time one of the treasures in the cabinet of the King of France, and that the coin was stolen many years ago, the general opinion being that it went to the crucible. The suggestion is presented of the possibility that such was not the fate of the piece in question, but that, saved from destruction, it here appears again. The owner of the piece is able to trace it in responsible hands for more than thirty years, which period carries us well back towards the time of the robbery alluded to. In brief, the story is this: — Mr. Connor was, for many years prior to 1870, an owner and manager of real estate in the city of Boston. About 1850 he had in some of his houses quite a colony of Italians. The rent falling due, one of his Italian tenants was unable to meet it, and placed in Mr. Connor’s hands this coin as security, exacting a promise that it should be kept and returned to him, stating that he prized it highly because it was a gift to him from a nobleman whom he knew in Italy, and who had presented it to him a long time before he left his native country. Not being redeemed, the coin was retained by Mr. Connor until his death, which occurred a few years ago, when it was inherited by his son, who, having no appreciation of its value, though perfectly aware of its great rarity, pierced it and wore it for a watch charm till last year, when it was sold to me.

Unfortunately for Woodward, his aureus of Pescennius Niger proved to be a fake. Because William Strobridge had virtually monopolized the field of ancient coinage until his retirement in 1878, one can excuse Woodward’s inexperience. Nonetheless, it was an embarrassment which, under the best of circumstances, would have taken time to forget. Always the critic, Frossard was not about to permit time’s healing process to take effect. Instead, in the March 1881 issue of



“Numisma”, he immortalized the incident with a thinly-veiled allegory entitled “The False Talisman”. With our readers’ patience, here it is verbatim:

### THE FALSE TALISMAN

Let it be known unto the people that there are men both learned and wise who are the possessors of ancient talismans and tokens of gold, silver, and brass, inscribed with the cabalistic signs and characters of kings, princes, and potentates who ruled of old; and these wise and prudent men have stores of these talismans, and keep them in their secret chambers, and set great store by them, and if by reason of trouble and affliction their hearts fail within them, they betake themselves unto their talismans and gaze upon the same, and interpret the signs thereon, and their hearts are cheered as with good tidings, and they come forth like strong men and go on rejoicing.

Now there dwelt in a distant country, called the Land of the Sun, a youth who inherited a vast estate, and ancient talismans in gold and silver and brass without number, and this youth wasted his inheritance and sold his talismans unto the sons of Israel, yea, he sold them all but one, and this one the sons of Israel would not buy, for being wise and learned they interpreted the signs thereon and explained them unto the youth, and said, It is not a true talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, whose superscription it bears, but is false, and the work of a sorcerer, one Becker, who dwelt in the forests of Germania. And the youth put the false talisman (which, through his foolishness was all that was left of his inheritance) unto his bosom, and saith, Peradventure I may find elsewhere a purchaser for this talisman. And he departed from his native land, and took ship, and sailed upon a wide and tempestuous sea, and a storm arising, he and his companions were cast upon a bleak and desolate shore.

Now there came forth one of the chief men of the land, and took him, and made him his slave, and set him to dig canals, him and his companions, and gave them a pittance and a hovel for their abode, and exacted from them a monthly tax. And after a time it came to pass, that because of hard toil disease preyed upon the body of the youth from the Land of the Sun, and he laid him upon his couch, sorely afflicted, for many days, and no one comforted him. And the lord of the canal came unto him, and said: Give me the monthly tax that is due me or I will cast thee into prison. And the youth arose from his couch, and fell at his master’s feet, and saith: Behold, my lord, my substance is exhausted, and I have nothing to satisfy thy demand, save a talisman of gold worth one thousand pieces of silver, bequeathed unto me by my father in my native land; and if thou wilt set me free from this bondage and let me return to my native land, I will give it thee. Then pulled he forth the false talisman, and gave it unto his master, and forthwith found favor in his eyes, and his master released him from his bond, and from his tax, and gave unto him a hundred pieces of silver, and the youth took ship, and returned to his native land, and bought a vineyard, and took unto himself a wife, even the daughter of a prince, and grew wise and prosperous.

But the lord of the canal saith, Behold I have a talisman of great price, and I will sell the same, and enlarge my possessions, and buy mules, and houses, and an estate. Now there dwelt not far from him a mighty man, a soothsayer and apothecary, one versed in the knowledge of the talismans of his own country, who bought and sold the same, and whose name was known throughout the length and breadth of the land. And the lord of the canal took a sharp instrument, and bored a hole through the talisman, and hung it with a golden chain around his neck, and mounted his mule, and rode to the apothecary, and showed him the talisman. And the apothecary went into his secret chamber, and took a book of chronicles of the Kings of Gaul, wherein are recorded the names of all the mighty rulers and potentates who coined talismans in days of old, and behold on a certain page in the book was written the name of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, and the apothecary did read, and his understanding was enlightened, for he saw it recorded that the priceless talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, had been stolen from the King’s treasury, and that the robbers had fled to a foreign land, and he saith unto himself, In verity this talisman is the same that was stolen from the treasury of the king of Gaul, behold it is of great price and value. Then came he forth and spoke unto the lord of the

canal and saith, I will give thee for this talisman five hundred pieces of silver; and he spread a feast unto him, yea beans and pork, (for the flesh of the swine is not accounted impure in that country) and gave unto him a drink from the fountain of living waters that is in the southwest corner of his shop, and they ate, and drank, and were merry. And when the feast was ended the lord of the canal took the money, even the five hundred pieces of silver, and bestrode his mule, and returned unto his native place.

Now the apothecary had many other talismans in gold, and silver, and brass, and he forthwith issued a proclamation unto the people of the land, wherein was an enumeration of the talismans and of the names of the Kings, rulers, and potentates that made them in days of old, and he told the people that on a certain day he would sell the talismans unto them. And he went to a large city on the border of the sea, where dwelt the sons of Knicker, and spread his treasures before them, the talismans, and the jewels, and the precious stones, the pearls and opals and rings and amulets, and likewise the books. Now the children of Knicker looked upon all these previous things and said one to another, Yea, they are good to behold and of great virtue, and we will buy thereof and enrich our treasures, and for the talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, we will give unto the apothecary one thousand, nay perchance two thousand pieces of fine silver, and it shall be our chief talisman, and we will keep it in our chief chamber, with sentinels to watch over it day and night, lest it be stolen from us as it was from the King of Gaul. But there dwelt among the children of Knicker a stranger from the distant land of the Parisii, a man wise and learned in the interpretation of talismans of ancient Kings and rulers, and when they showed him the talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, he shrugged his shoulders after the manner of the people of his own land.

Now the children of Knicker were wise after their generation, and they interpreted this and said: It is not a true talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, but is false. And on the day appointed for the sale the apothecary stood before the children of Knicker, and the high steward, who was the custodian of the talismans and other precious things, sat on a throne and called out the number of each talisman, and the children of Knicker sat on the ground before him, and spread out their money, and each talisman was given to the one who offered the highest price. And the children of Knicker, and the people of distant towns, who had gathered together, freely purchased the talismans of the Angli, and of the Galli, and Americani of the high steward, but when he called out the talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, and on a plater of pure alabaster held the same before them, they remained silent, and would not offer their silver for the same.

Then did the apothecary marvel and saith: Will ye not give me even one thousand pieces of silver for this rare and precious talisman? And one of them, a man fearless and strong, their spokesman, arose and spoke unto the apothecary with a loud voice and saith: "It is bogus," which signifieth false. Then did the apothecary perceive his error, and he saw that the talisman was false, and he was angered with himself for his foolishness, by which he had lost much money, even five hundred pieces of silver, and he forthwith betook himself unto his own country, and returned to his shop, and put the false talisman in a crucible, and took a brazen pestle in his right hand, and with one mighty blow broke he the false talisman of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, into a thousand pieces, and scattered the dust thereof on a field behind his dwelling, and put on sackcloth and ashes and fasted and mourned for seven days and seven nights. And when the days of his fasting were over he stood by the fountain of living waters, that is in the southwest corner of his shop, and took an oath upon the same, and said: The talismans of Pescennius, surnamed Niger, and other ancient rulers, behold, I am as a babe, and I know nothing, and I will never again buy them, nor sell them, nor harbor them in my house. And he kept his oath, and bought and sold talismans and drugs, and precious ointments, and out of his fountain he sold water to the wayfarers and weary, and he bought and sold the tomahawks and pipes of peace, pearls, and precious stones, and patent medicines, and trafficked much, and abode in his shop, but visited he not again the children of Knicker for a season; and behold the field where he cast the dust of the false talisman became bare and sterile, and is so even to this day.

Whereas most of the hobby derived considerable amusement from Frossard's piece, there was one man who did not. Smoldering in his Roxbury pharmacy, Woodward's first rejoinder was relatively mild. In his April, 1881 catalog of the Clogston Collection, Lot #1307 is a copy of Andrew's excellent work on late date cents. The lot is described thusly:

Lot 1307 A description of 268 varieties of U.S. Cents, 1816-57, in the collection of Frank D. Andrews, 1881.

This unpretending little book of fifty-four pages is the work of an original investigator, and is a real and not a pretended contribution to numismatic science. It may with truth be said of it, "a work of absolute necessity to Collectors of American Copper Coins." With the exception of Maris's "Varieties of the Copper Issues of the United States Mint in the year 1794," and Crosby's account of the Cents of 1793, published with Levick's Plate in the American Journal of Numismatics, and "Appleton's Issues of the Mint of the United States," printed in the same Journal, and reprinted in a small edition, it is the only work that has ever appeared on this specialty of any importance whatever. True, a sumptuous and presumptuous volume has been printed on the subject, but a diligent perusal will convince any person that it is perhaps the only book ever written, from which no new fact could be gleaned. Having carefully read it, I fail to discover in it anything new, except numerous ridiculous blunders of the author, who I judge wrote his book in a hurry, to suit his pictures, and published it under the impression so elegantly expressed by one of his learned coadjutors, that "The Americans are fools and will buy anything."

The "sumptuous and presumptuous volume" is, of course, Frossard's "United States Cents and Half Cents," published in 1879. Woodward's verdict on the work was, most scholars would now agree, tolerably close to the mark. However, his book review must have seemed small recompense for the gross insult offered by "The False Talisman", not to mention a further (if lesser) provocation which appeared in the May, 1881 issue of "Numisma". As the abuse heaped upon him cumulated, Woodward's creative fires began to mount accordingly. At length, they break out into a virtual conflagration, the result being an 1881 version of "Ichabod Crane". This masterpiece of satire appears as a digression to the author's description of Lot #1374 in his auction sale of June, 1881. Regretably, only the early copies of the catalog contain the account. However, no numismatist receiving an early copy could have failed to appreciate that Frossard (of Irvington-on-Hudson) and Ichabod were one and the same:

"Whatever sails up and down the North River, can but be impressed with the picturesque beauties of its shores, — the lofty palisades, the hills and valleys, and the distant mountains, so impress their features on the mind of the voyager, that the lovely picture can never be erased.

Every reader of history as related by that delightful and veracious chronicler, Diedrich Knickerbocker, knows by heart the biography of Rip Van Winkle, particularly the account of his protracted slumber; and the traveller who visits the Kaatskills and has pointed out to him the exact spot of Rip's long repose, as he voyages leisurely down the river and comes abreast of that little hyphenated village on the Eastern shore, if its somnolent influence does not overcome him, is immediately impressed with the idea that Rip, if he had any notion of taking a long sleep, ought to have crossed the river, dropped down to that little burg and there fallen asleep; for had he done so, his nap might have been uninterrupted for a century at least.

Now it happens that the same historian records the life and adventures of Ichabod Crane.



He not only treats us to a charming picture of Ichabod as schoolmaster, as playmate of the boys and girls, but he gives us an insight into his love affairs: he tells us how Ichabod, invited to a quilting frolic, borrowed a nag of Hans Van Ripper, and went wooing the buxom daughter of old Baltus Van Tassel; how he was jilted by the fair Katrina, and chased on horseback on his way home by a fearful spectre, who carried his head in his hand; how, just as the luckless schoolmaster crossed the keystone of the bridge over which, it is generally believed, goblins and witches cannot pass — and we pause to remark that this philosophical view is greatly strengthened by the history of Tam O'Shanter's midnight ride\* — the goblin rider, with one mighty effort, threw his head at the poor retreating pedagogue, who, though he sought by dodging to avoid the missile, was felled to the earth. The horse of Van Ripper was found in the morning at his master's door; the saddle, which fell off in the race, was found trampled and torn by the heavy hoofs of the goblin horse, but Ichabod never more was seen. True, our historian intimates that the weird, headless horseman was no other than Brom Bones, Ichabod's rival with the blue-eyed Katrina, — that the head, which we, as students of the occult sciences, know was fleshless and bloody, — was but a harmless pumpkin, and that Ichabod simply ran away; that he afterwards became a lawyer, an editor, and what not, and traded and grew rich, and went to the Legislature. All this, however, is mere surmise, authenticated by no shadow of evidence. Up to this point the history of Ichabod Crane, like that of Rip Van Winkle, is without a break or a flaw, — the relation is in each case, as it were, a chain of evidence; each fact supports and strengthens every other fact, but it is quite clear that from the moment the bridge was crossed, history failed and imagination filled its place.

Recent events have, in a measure, however, cleared up the mystery. There appeared, a few years ago, at Sleepy Hollow, a gentleman, the very counterpart of Ichabod, somewhat rounded out, to be sure, from his former angular proportions, but still bearing enough of his peculiarities of character and appearance to make the likeness observable if not unmistakable. On his arrival, which was by way of Castle Garden, this gentleman settled down immediately into Ichabod's profession of pedagogue. We hasten to present the facts and to the development of our theory; further on we shall offer evidence in its support more conclusive by far than that by which the existence of Symmes's Hole has been demonstrated.\*\*

Little more than twenty years ago it became necessary to repair the bridge over the haunted stream which Ichabod crossed on that fateful night, — the stream near Wiley's Swamp, for a full account of which we refer to Diedrich's History. When, on the second day, the workman renewed their labors in the morning, a plank was removed near the edge of the stream and at the end of the bridge, and under the plank, wonderful to relate, were found impressed in the hard earth the exact form and outline of Ichabod Crane, — the small flat head, the huge, long ears, the lanky arms and legs, the flat feet, which might have served for shovels, all were there as in a picture, and more wonderful than all, the hole was still warm, — and scarcely a doubt existed in the minds of the workmen, to whom the facts of Ichabod's disappearance were well known, that, awakened by the operations of the day before, he had risen in the night and taken himself off. So far it was all clear to the minds of those serving men; but how Ichabod could have been concealed there for all the long years, was not so certain. Just here science and philosophy come in. It is clear that when Ichabod was struck by the ghastly skull, he was stunned; in his pain and terror he crawled under the bridge, — here he fell asleep. The influence of the headless horseman — for an account of whom we again make reference to our historian, — the nature of the haunted brook, the close proximity of Andre's tree, † and the drowsy character of all around him, did the rest; and here, all unknown to the historian, was repeated the phenomenon of the Kaatskills; something the like of which never happened and never will happen except on the lovely sleep shores of the North River.‡

It was not for some years after the event so minutely described, that the strange new comer appeared at Sleepy Hollow, and, as all the friends and pupils of Ichabod had passed away, the appearance of identity was not observed by any of his neighbors, and the great discovery was finally perfected by a man from Boston, a place famed for inventions and great discoveries; principal among the inventions is ranked — no allusion to the pork-baked beans, but amongst the discoveries the one here chronicled "takes the cake".

The stranger that was, though a comparatively long residence makes him a stranger no longer, — this sentence seems a little mixed, but the reader is assured there is no pun here, if he expects to find one, — has been numerously interviewed, but he wisely keeps his own counsel as to all that concerns his hybernation. He is fond of talking about his residence in Parree, a place that none of his neighbors know anything about, but which they suppose is over in Jersey, and after dinner he sometimes boasts of being in the army during the late war, — which he says he entered as a non com. and from which he emerged as a Colonel, with shoulder straps, brass buttons, and things. When his back is turned the neighbors pityingly tap their foreheads and say the non com.††† part is evident enough now, but we “can’t see” the Colonel. For getting his love of the last century, if he be the veritable Ichabod, he has taken a wife, one of the fair daughters of the Empire State; he has become an editor and an author, and his fame now extends from Irvington-on-Hudson all the way to Harlem and back again. Men know him generally as the sage of Sleepy Hollow, but if any title next to Colonel — which by a pleasing fiction he still clings to — pleases him best, it is that of Contributor to American Numismatic History.

That the sage and historian is the successor in office of Ichabod Crane, is established beyond peradventure; that he is the original, some ignorant, unphilosophical men may doubt, but with due respect to other men’s prejudices and superstitions, we avow our own unwavering belief in our own theory that the sage is the original, sleeping, it is true, for a long time, but now redivious. By this theory as an article of faith and practice, we shall abide.”

\* For the facts concerning this event we refer to the great Scottish historian, Bobby Burns.  
\*\* Symmes’s Theory of Concentric Spheres, demonstrating that the earth is hollow, — habitable within, and widely open at the poles. 12 mo. Cincinnati, 1826.

† We must not interrupt the narrative; but for a full account of all the interesting events, places, etc. to which we make only the briefest allusion, we refer once more and finally, to the old chronicler Knickerbocker, whose works can be found in the Boston Public Library, the Astor Library, and it may be in other repositories of learning.

‡ If it happens that a strange proclivity to lying and fondness for dirt, has been observed in our hero, it may perhaps be accounted for by his long continued lying in the dirt. This explanatory suggestion can but commend itself to the metaphysical mind.

††† Non Com. in the vernacular is short for Non Compos Mentis, in which sense the neighbors use it; just what our hero means by it he has never explained.

“Ichabod” does not end the exchange between Frossard and Woodward. However, from the artistic standpoint, it is certainly the climax of the feud and, therefore, the best basis on which to rest the case which we began so many pages ago.

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## A REVIEW OF HALF CENT LITERATURE

by *Walter H. Breen*

Compared with the extensive bibliographical material on large cents, there has been very little published on half-cents. I take this fact to reflect, among collectors even as among the general public, a general lack of interest. The half-cent has been something of a poor relative of the cent from its earliest years, in minting techniques, in design, in half-hearted attempts at forced circulation, in small mintages and smaller acceptance. Poor relatives, however, sometimes do turn out to be Cinderellas, just as ugly ducklings occasionally do grow up to be swans; and perhaps the half-cent is an instance of the kind. Growing appreciation of the denomination appears to be reflected in the literature. A critical review follows.

We might as well begin with the earliest source book extant, not published but available for consultation in the National Archives. This is the *Cent Book 1796-1803*, a workbook kept by the Coiner's Department (Henry Voigt and Adam Eckfeldt). Its importance here is in testifying to minting techniques, specifically the different ones used for half-cents and for cents. In every instance half-cents appear to have been an afterthought, planchets or blanks for them being cut down from copper tokens or misstruck cents in several different years and therefore varying considerably in weight and durability.

Successive printed Annual Reports of the Director of the Mint, 1795-1857, testify to general lack of interest in the denomination, small mintages, and several long periods of discontinuance — though neither the Mint Director nor even the President, but only Congress, has authority to suspend coinage of any denomination. Some of these successive reports also exist in fair copies (handwritten) in the National Archives. In addition, there are hundreds of documents in the Archives, especially 1811-57, relevant to half-cents, though less than for most other denominations. These are primary sources for the often incredible history of the Mint's carelessness in coining and bookkeeping procedures, of the suspension of half-cent coinage in 1811, of the stockpiling of 1829-48 which produced many years of proof-only mintages, and of repeated official attempts to abolish the denomination.

The very earliest numismatic books aimed at the general public gave comparatively little space to the half-cent other than to quote mintage figures from Director's Reports and to show how the designs followed those of the cents. These include items such as the Eckfeldt and BuBois *Manuals*, Hickcox's *History of American Coinage* (Albany, N.Y., 1858), which mentions patterns having been struck in 1813 — a story apparently completely imaginary — and the *Mint Manual* of James Ross Snowden, which created a brief fad or craze for coin collecting in the 1860's. Snowden, incidentally, is our only source for the information that the majority of the 1857 half-cents were melted down at the Mint; and even he gave no clue as to the number or weight of the coins melted.

Dr. Montroville W. Dickeson, whom *Time* once called "a Burton Holmes of the 1860's", compiled his *American Numismatic Manual* as a guide to collectors of all American series, and saw it become a best seller, going into three editions (1859, 1860, 1865). The collector's bible of its own day, and — like most bibles — crammed



full of errors, Dickeson's book nevertheless gave information not then elsewhere available, and attempted a coverage of American numismatics so comprehensive as not to be equalled within a single pair of covers to the present day. What he did was to attempt to comprise in a single book the material (or as much as he could get of it) later to be elaborated by Crosby on colonials, Sheldon on large cents, various other writers on silver and gold coins, etc., together with a treatise on American Indian artifacts which might have had some monetary use. One can admire the man's ambition while deploring the errors — though to be sure the refined methods of comparison necessary for study of some series did not exist in his day, some not having been developed until the last decade. He deserves commendation for a pioneering effort.

One of the oddest stories to have been recorded by Dickeson, nevertheless, failed to get into any of the three editions of his book. It is that of the teen-aged Joseph J. Mickley's discovery of the dies later used to make the 1811 half-cent restrike. This story is found in an unsigned undated manuscript volume, bought by the ANS museum in Thomas L. Elder's auction of July 18, 1913, lot 181, filed under *Miscellany*.

A few collectors assembled specialized groups of half-cents. Mickley was one of them. His collection was auctioned by W. Elliot Woodward in 1867. A review of the Mickley sale — until then probably the greatest coin auction yet held in the United States — appeared in Ebenezer Mason's *Coin & Stamp Collector's Magazine* January, 1868. On page 34 of the review appear comments on the anomalous 1797 lettered-edge half-cent, beginning long speculation that the variety might have been struck on left-over blanks from 1795 (as many specimens are unusually heavy, approaching the pre-1795 weight standard), or might even have been intended as a pattern or experimental piece. This appears to have begun a trend: many publications in the following 70 to 80 years relating to half-cents have emphasized speculation about the mysteries of the issue, mysteries not all entirely cleared up to the present day.

The Philadelphia Quaker physician, Dr. Edward Maris, in 1869 issued a small pamphlet devoted to *The U.S. Copper Issues of the Year 1794*. Mainly devoted to large cents, it nevertheless covered varieties of half-cents, and it is the first systematic attempt at description of them. (There is a very rare second edition of this brochure, dated 1870, including some new cent varieties but no new half-cents.) Maris had a keen eye for minute differences, but was apparently unaware that a hub was used to make three of the 1794 obverses and three of the reverses. He learned quickly enough about hubs, though: in the January 1871 *American Journal of Numismatics*, p. 59, he cited a dent in the hair showing up on all, or almost all, half-cent obverses from 1841 through 1857, in the identical spot — proof that it was an injury to the hub rather than to individual coins. In the same article he went into some detail about distinguishing restrikes from originals in the rare proof-only years by the size of the berries, thus triggering a controversy not settled until the appearance of my original manuscript as to the status and probable issue time of certain varieties.

In 1879 Edouard Frossard, a coin dealer with enthusiasm far in excess of his

command of English, published his *Monograph of U.S. Cents and Half-Cents* (Irvington, N.Y., privately printed), based on the collection of some friend or client. It seems to have been the first attempt, after Dickeson, to describe the whole series; unfortunately, variety descriptions later than 1794 are useless or all but useless. Only 300 copies were issued, but pirated reprints appeared. Unlike the somewhat similar *Illustrated History* based on the Dr. J. Hewitt Judd collection, the Frossard Monograph does not appear to have been a fixed-price sale offering, and the historical and numismatic information contained therein did represent the “state of the art” as of his own day.

This was quickly followed, as though in reaction, by a serial article *The Coins of the United States*, in the *J.W. Scott Coin Collector's Journal* from 1879 through 1883. This was highly systematic and long remained a basic reference. The serial broke off after describing half-cents and cents (in part), the materials for its continuation being turned over, for reasons still unknown, to one Francis Worcester Doughty, a hack writer specializing in books for boys, who reprinted the cent part of the serial under his own name in 1890. Doughty seems to have cared little for cents, specializing rather in coins depicting elephants. The original serial is credited to David Proskey, an extremely astute dealer who quickly suffered unpopularity and libelous attacks in various quarters, partly because of his association with J.W. Scott, partly from his outspoken opinions. Frossard, for instance, bitterly attacked Proskey, Scott, the CCJ and most of the catalogues in his own house organ *Numisma* – receiving much the same treatment in return. Frossard's pet name for Scott was “The N.Y. Great Boaster”, and for Proskey “that nice-looking young man with a big india-rubber conscience” – for what peccadilloes nobody now knows. Proskey numbers for half-cents have been superseded by Gilbert numbers although Proskey managed to escape some of the more egregious errors picked up in the Gilbert book.

George W. Rice printed a series of garrulous comments on half-cents, specifically on the large-berry and small-berry restrikes and originals of 1852 and other years, in the February 1895 *Numismatist*; this article was reprinted in the 1937 volume (vol. 50, p. 298). His speculations showed that he was on the right track, but the information necessary to solve the problem of the 1852's was not available until the late 1950's. The coin dealer Charles Steigerwalt made a more closely reasoned dissertation in the August 1906 *Numismatist*, p. 277, someone else in the February 1907 issue, and still others in the letter columns of later issues; this topic became for awhile nearly as popular as speculations about the origin of the existing “1804” dollars.

In the July 1897 *American Journal of Numismatics*, Sylvester Sage Crosby, the Boston watchmaker-turned-numismatic scholar directed his attention to the varieties of the 1793 half-cent. The information there published was repeated in his privately printed *The U.S. Coinage of 1793* (1897 with various pirated reprints). The four varieties of 1793 are described and pictured, but without indication of emission sequence or rarity; and in the book version, the fake Washington half-cent of 1793 is included, as a pattern, despite its extremely questionable history – a history that Crosby might have known about. In all likelihood either Crosby was

including it as a favor to his friend William Sumner Appleton, who owned one of the two extant specimens, or else he honestly believed in error that the thing was genuine, presumably having seen only electrotype copies rather than either of the two original fabrications.

Charles Steigerwalt returned to the question of half-cent varieties, this time of 1794, in the 1908 *Numismatist*, p. 176, managing to describe eight of the nine known die combinations. His publication in what was by then the most widely read numismatic periodical of the day may have inspired those to follow.

Dr. George R. Ross, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, published a serial article on half-cent varieties in the *Numismatist* during 1915-1917. Evidently independent of the Ebenezer Gilbert effort, it is in some ways better, in some ways not as good. This is the same G.R. Ross who also issued studies of New Jersey and Connecticut coppers; his contributions, important in their own day, have been almost forgotten, unjustly so. He was one of the more accurate students of the early American copper coinages.

Ebenezer Gilbert completed a very uneven manuscript on the whole series of half-cents and managed to get New York coin dealer Thomas L. Elder to publish it in 1916. Despite the earlier work of Ross and Proskey, both in some ways superior, this book quickly became the standard reference — most probably because of its photographic plates. Elder later issued a one-page supplement describing a second variety of 1831, “Gilbert 1A”, mistakenly thought for a long time to be the “real” original of the year despite its having the 1836 reverse in both perfect and broken states. Your copy of the Gilbert book, if original, ought to have the supplement tipped in; unfortunately, many copies now known lack it, some having been bound after Elder’s death from previously unbound warehouse copies. There have been several pirated reprints, some marked with new publishing data, others not so marked; in all these the plates are glossy and much thinner than on the originals. The original edition has larger pages than do any of the reprints, though they vary in margin size; my copy is 9 x 12, others may have been trimmed down, but the key to its being an original is the quality of the plates, which are matte contact prints, clear everywhere except at the margins of three or four. All editions include the same plate errors: there is no 1806 Gilbert 2 obverse illustrated, a second Gilbert 11 being shown instead; the reverses of 1805 Gilbert 3 and 4 are actually of two Gilbert 3’s. The Gilbert book long remained the standard reference, despite lacking a rational emission sequence, lacking reasonable historical material, lacking a usable rarity scale, and having inaccurate descriptions, typographical errors which in some cases destroyed the meaning of the sentences containing them, and plate errors. Gilbert appears to have had access to a first-rate collection (probably that of F.R. Alvord) and therefore the materials for a good reference work, but he must have been dreadfully pressured to rush into print. Possibly the appearance of the Ross serial, which he nowhere mentions, induced him to do here what he had earlier done with the 1794 and 1796 cents.

The Alvord collection, mentioned a moment ago, was legendary in its own day, even as the Brobston, Showers and Norweb collections have become. S. Hudson Chapman, long after his break with his brother Henry, catalogued the collection for auction in Philadelphia, June 9, 1924. S.H. Chapman was not even the historian



that his brother Henry had been, and his memory was still less reliable, but at least he had the good sense to illustrate all the important rarities from this collection. For the most part his comments in the catalogue are accurate — probably because of notations made by Mr. Alvord. Here, for the first time, the “Gilbert 2” of 1795 is discredited as a fraud. It had fooled Gilbert, who may never have taken the time to examine the piece close up.

There were various other collections of half-cents formed and dispersed in the two decades following the Alvord sale, but nothing of equal importance. The late Joseph Brobston, an executive of — if memory serves — the Hercules Powder Co., formed one of the five or six all time great collections, and about 1949-50 developed the ambition to write a book replacing Gilbert’s. It did get far enough to be the subject of a slide-talk before the Philadelphia Coin Club in 1950. I met him in that year, partly as a result of his published appeal for information on that series. His researches were mostly based on examination of coins, notation of their frequency of appearance, and reports of prices realized at auctions during the 1940’s. Brobston never published his findings and his collection was sold at fixed prices by Stack’s in a 1963 catalogue. There were also a dozen bound presentation copies issued that included actual photographic plates.

From 1952 through 1960, I wrote most of the auction sales for New Netherlands Coin Co. and contributed information for the few that have since then appeared. I contributed part of the information appearing in the so-called “Anderson Dupont” auction of 1954. (There was never a person of that name; the name referred to Charles Anderson and Charles Dupont, two intermediaries who obtained the collection in 1954. The collection’s original owner, a Massachusetts estate of fabulous wealth and antiquity, has not been disclosed to date.) The Hillyer Ryder collection, retained almost intact by Wayte Raymond, was auctioned in 1954 by New Netherlands and the descriptions therein included an early version of my numbering system — since changed owing to the discovery of new varieties. Wayte Raymond in 1954 published several monographs by me, including *The U.S. Patterns of 1792* and *The U. S. Minor Coinages 1793-1916*, as part of his *Coin Collector’s Journal* series. The 1792 Patterns monograph was, of course, not devoted to half-cents, but it is mentioned here because in it I identified the engraver of the obverse dies of the 1793 half-cent as the same man who cut the obverse of the 1792 Disme, the engraver of the 1793 reverses as the engraver of the reverses of the 1793 single-bow wreath cents, and specifically mentioned Joseph Wright and Adam Eckfeldt.

Arlie Slabaugh issued an article on assembling a type collection of half-cents in the July 1951 *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine*, repeating the older errors current in his day. Dr. J. Hewitt Judd, using about a twentieth of the information I had supplied him and his sometime collaborator William Guild (one of my oldest friends), published a revision of the Adams-Woodin book on pattern and experimental pieces, including several odd half-cents: my 1795 overstrike on a copper trialpiece of a 1794 half-dollar (though in error illustrating it over the one next mentioned), Prof. Charles Ruby’s similar overstrike on a copper trialpiece of a 1795 half-dollar, and the 1854 and 1856 copper-nickel impressions. He relegated the 1793 and

"1806" Washington items to an appendix on forgeries. I published two new varieties in the December 1953 *Numismatic Scrapbook*, pp. 1170-1171, but contrary to expectation they were not followed up with a flood of additional examples.

Q. David Bowers and James F. Ruddy issued a revision of Gilbert, using in part information derived from auction catalogues written by me or in turn drawing on information derived from me. The book is titled *United States Half Cents 1793-1857* (Creative Printing, Johnson City, N.Y., 1962); it contains no historical information, merely a listing of varieties. My disagreements with it are minor.

*Editor's note: The above article was written circa 1966, and was extracted from the unpublished manuscript on United States Half Cents written by the author. It is published here for the first time, with the gracious permission of the author. Any half-cent literature which has appeared since 1966 has not been discussed herewith.*

## AUCTION CATALOGS DOMINATE

### KATEN DELAWARE SALE

The 52nd Auction Sale by Frank and Laurese Katen held in conjunction with the MANA convention produced high prices, particularly auction catalogs.

The four Gillette sales by George Bauer estimated at \$40.00 fetched \$85.00 on a bid of \$220.00. Bluestone catalogs doubled and tripled estimates of \$10.00-\$20.00; Bolender catalogs normally priced at \$15.00 doubled estimates; Wayte Raymond catalogs were equally strong in number of bids and prices realized.

Stack's catalogs have been increasing in value over the last two years, but this sale produced exceptional advances. Most small catalogs brought \$15.00-\$18.00 with many exceptions as high as \$45.00.

Part four of the Wylie Hoard of early United States Auction Catalogs being offered as duplicates of previous sales brought strong prices, in some instances, exceeding previous highs. A copy of Loubat, "The Medallie History of the United States of America 1776-1876" published in 1878, brought \$170.00 on an estimate of \$150.00.

Lot 1557, a Rollin and Feuadant auction sale of 1887, the collection of Ponton d'Amecourt erroneously listed an estimate of \$50.00, was sold on the floor for \$575.00. The last lot, 1558, Spink sale of 1911 catalogued by Leonard Forrer, fetched \$150.00 on an estimate of \$100.00.

Next sale by the Katens will be held April 25-26, 1981, in conjunction with the TriClub second annual convention.

## AMERICAN CLASSICS

### Famous New Netherlands Coin Company Auction Sale Catalogues

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John Ford, Walter Breen, Don Taxay, and Jon Hanson

32nd	3/3/51. U.S. coins, currency.	\$ 7.50
34th	10/5/51. Virgil Brand coll. 1794 large cents. D.C. Wismer Estate obsolete.	12.50
35th	11/10/51. D.C. Wismer Estate, obsolete paper. Ryder coll. Minor U.S. Patterns.	7.50
39th	11/22/52. 2 Plates. John Pawling coll. Half cents and Large cents. U.S. coins, Hard Times Tokens.	12.50
40th	5/9/53. 2 Plates. U.S. coins, tokens, medals, superb U.S. notes.	20.00
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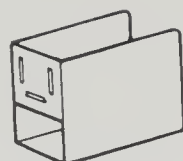
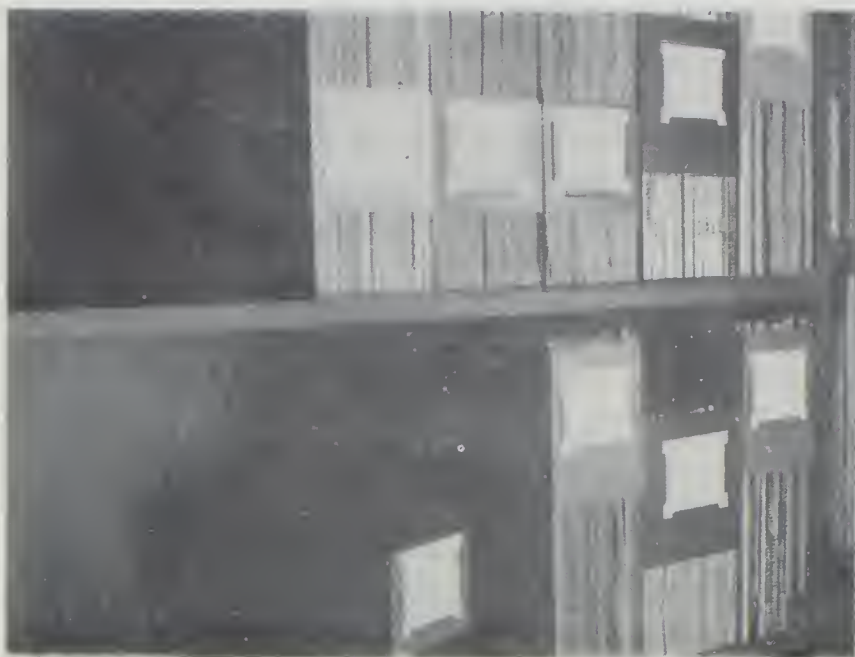
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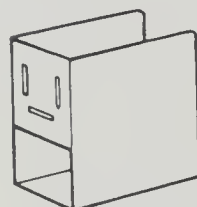
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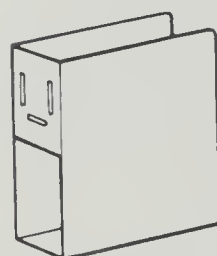
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